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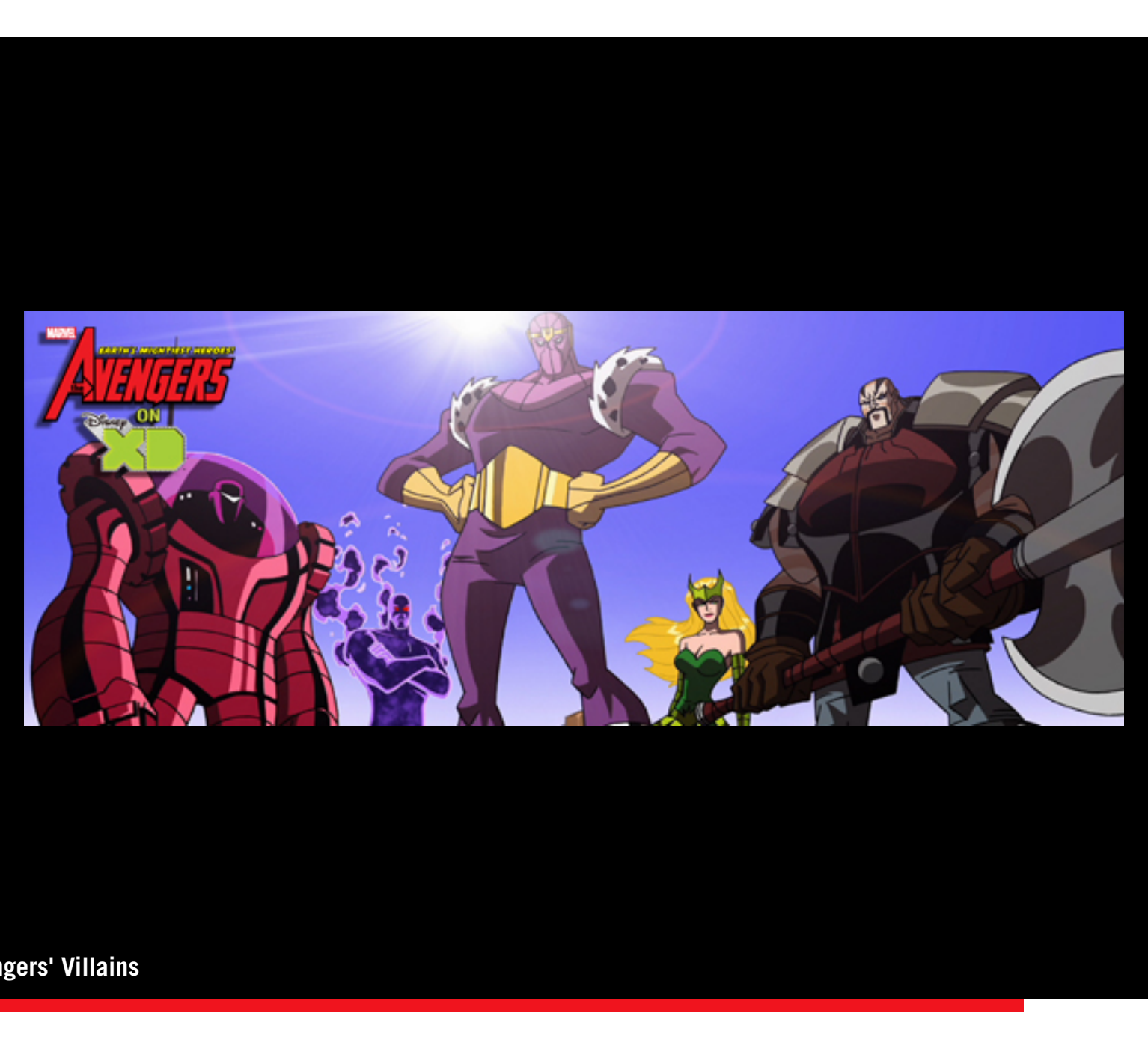

Assembling The Avengers' Villains

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AVENGERS: EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

ASSEMBLING THE AVENGERS' VILLAINS

We speak with 'The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!' Supervising Producer Josh Fine about the show's villains!

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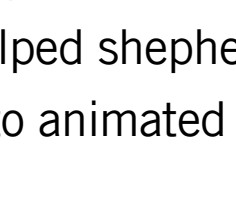
This Sunday, February 13, relive some of the Avengers' greatest battles in the special Villaintine's Day event from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. ET on Disney XD. Catch your favorite episodes of "The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!" as the team faces off against their deadliest threats yet, and check in with Marvel.com every day this week for a look at the diabolical menaces the group will face!

Ready to celebrate the Avengers' greatest threats with the "The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!" Villaintine's Day marathon beginning at 8:00 a.m. ET this Sunday on Disney XD?! Well, just in case you need a touch more convincing, we spoke with Supervising Producer Joshua Fine about the process of creating some of Earth's Mightiest Villains. Along with Story Editor Christopher Yost, Fine has helped shepherd the Marvel Universe's greatest heroes and villains into animated action with the show.



The Leader, Abomination and Absorbing Man from The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

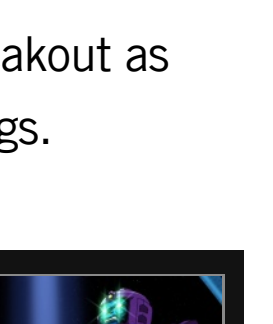
Marvel.com: What was the most difficult part of deciding which villains to include in "Breakout"?

Joshua Fine: Chris Yost and I dug through every Marvel handbook, encyclopedia, and archive we could to find as wide a variety of rogues as possible. Populating four different super villain prisons with distinct sub-types of villains--radiation-types, tech-types, genetic-types--meant going for some pretty obscure faces in a few spots. But overall, I think we got a nice spread of characters in there.

Honestly, the hardest part of figuring out which villains to showcase was figuring out if there were any villains that we *didn't* want to imprison at the start of the show, so that we could either give them an origin story in a later episode or tie them into one of the other ongoing villain plots.

Marvel.com: How and why did you settle on Graviton being the main one?

Joshua Fine: We looked at a few different scenarios for launching the series, bringing the team together, and being an overall threat for season 1. Eventually we settled on the super villain breakout as being the perfect mechanism for all three of those things.

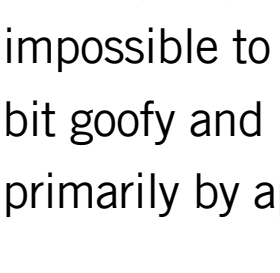


Kang from The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

(Avengers Trivia: the other leading contender for launching the series? The Kang Invasion. Chris and I worked up a scenario where Kang could be a season-long big-bad, but none of the folks involved with development--ourselves included--liked it as much as the breakout direction. So we ended up condensing that story into what became our epic Kang three-parter.)

Once we knew we were going the Breakout direction, Chris very astutely pointed out that we were going to need a major focal villain for the second half. This would allow the Avengers to actually work together against a single threat and have a distinct victory at the end of the pilot. Since we knew we wanted the Breakout itself to feel huge, widespread, and largely uncontained as a way to set up more stories later in the season, the Avengers couldn't stop the whole Breakout, just one part of it.

It took us some time to come up with the right baddy for the job. Some of the names we talked about initially for guys with the right power-levels were Magneto, Doctor Doom, and the Molecule Man. Magneto and Doom had the unfortunate stigma of being arch-enemies of other Marvel super teams, and it just felt distinctly wrong to bring the Avengers together by fighting the most iconic foe of either the X-Men or the Fantastic Four. Molecule Man worked better as an Avengers villain, but his character itself was just a bit too awkward. On one side of the spectrum, his powers let him do virtually anything he can think of--something that's virtually impossible to beat by force. On the other side, his personality is a bit goofy and unintimidating--and in the past he's been defeated primarily by appealing to that side of him.



Graviton from The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

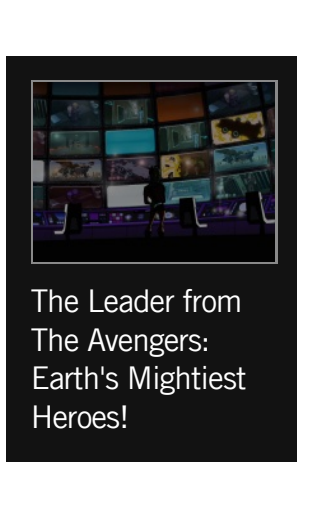
I knew we needed an epic throwdown to kick-off the series and I didn't want the Avengers to be able to talk their way out of it, something that Ant-Man definitely would have tried against Molecule Man. I kept coming back to the idea of Magneto's powers going full-blast, leveling city blocks, hurling skyscrapers--stuff that would visually make the audience feel like the team was up against a threat that was totally unstoppable. Once we decided that that was the right kind of feel for the fight, Chris dug through his encyclopedic memory of Avengers comics and came up with a lesser-known West Coast Avengers villain called Graviton. I did a little reading up and agreed that he was the perfect fit for what we wanted to do.

Marvel.com: Out of the Avengers, whose "rogue gallery" is your favorite?

Joshua Fine: Tough call here…Cap brings Red Skull and Zemo, Iron Man has Mandarin and Crimson Dynamo, Ant-Man has…um… Egghead.

I'd probably go with Thor. Loki is my favorite villain in the Marvel Universe and additionally you get Amora, Skurge, Hela, Surtur, Frost Giants, and a veritable menagerie of threats from the length and breadth of the nine realms.

Marvel.com: Which villain would you ideally like to have on the show that hasn't been on yet?



The Leader from The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

Joshua Fine: I feel like this is a trick question. There are still seven episodes left in Season One and another 26 in Season Two that are already in post-production. And I can tell you that there are a lot more villains appearing in Season 2 that I've been wanting to see. So you're just trying to get me to give away someone that I'm saving for a possible Season 3, right?

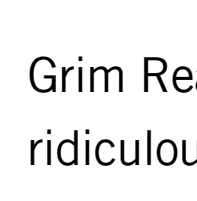
Okay…I'll go with Taskmaster. Chris and I tried to find the right place to work him into the first two seasons, but just never got him in there. I love pretty much everything about this guy, from his look, to his abilities, to his motivation, and I know there's a great episode just waiting to happen with him.

Marvel.com: Do you feel that developing a villain is more difficult than creating a well-rounded hero?

Joshua Fine: The challenge is about equal in the sense that in both cases you need to figure out what drives the character. Where do they come from? What have they been through? What do they believe in? And what are they trying to achieve? What is their personality and how does that come across?

With villains you have two extra challenges though--the first is that your villain usually has to demonstrate something about your heroes. His motivations and goals have to do something to your hero's character arc for the series--usually by changing the way the hero thinks about something. The second challenge is that you usually have less time to develop a villain on screen. Where the heroes come back week after week to face new threats, the villains usually show up for one or two episodes and then disappear for long stretches of time.

The advantage you get though is that the plot of the episode that a villain is in is usually driven *by* the villain. The threat a villain creates for the episode is usually very indicative of who that villain is, whereas with heroes, you have to show who they are by how the *cope* with a threat.



Baron Zemo from The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

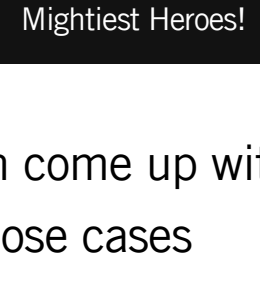
Marvel.com: Which villain was the biggest challenge in making sure they translated well onscreen, in terms of design, voice acting, etc.?

Joshua Fine: Our design team and voice cast have done such an amazing job that it's hard to say that any one character ended up being more challenging than any others, because on the hardest characters the team really rose to the occasion. I'll give special acknowledgement to Grim Reaper, Baron Zemo, Kang, and the Leader though, because they all had the deck stacked against them.

Grim Reaper's original costume in the comics looks, frankly, ridiculous. But when Ciro Nieli did the updated design for him, he hit the ball way out of the park. Just so incredibly cool. Incidentally, it was also Ciro's idea to use Lance Henriksen as Reaper's voice. This worked out so well that Chris and I abandoned our intention to use Reaper as just a one episode throw-away, and made him a recurring character in the first season.

Baron Zemo--let's be honest--he's clad head-to-toe in purple and polka-dotted fur and has a sock over his face. But thanks to a slick costume design, a horrific disfigurement sequence in our World War II flashback, and some amazing voice acting…you don't even notice it. When Robin Atkin Downes opens his mouth as this character, you just shiver. Yeah, he's wearing purple and fur, but you know he can kill you.

Kang was in a similar spot. One of those more far-out comics designs, where you're just not sure it'll work once it's brought to life. But the updated version looks great, and Jonathan Adams did a superb job bringing all of the gravity and cool confidence to this character that he needed.



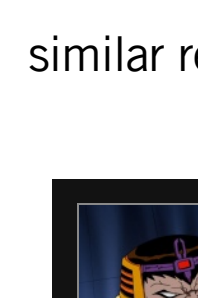
The Masters of Evil from The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

The Leader was a character that we had huge aspirations for right from the beginning. We wanted to make him a more impressive, brilliant threat than he'd ever been before. Thanks to Jeffrey Combs, I think we were able to achieve this. He's the kind of actor where you can give him a three page monologue to read, and he'll do the whole thing start-to-finish brilliantly the first time. And then come up with something even better the second time. It's one of those cases where you could actually listen to the Leader read the phone book, and it would still end up being supremely entertaining.

Marvel.com: Who is your favorite Marvel "The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!" villain? Your favorite lesser known one?

Joshua Fine: I gave this away above, but Loki's my favorite. I love working on really smart villains, the ones who think six moves ahead of the heroes--Leader is a runner up because of this. Working with Chris to figure out "The Isle of Silence" Micro-Episode was a ton of fun, because it meant playing the trickster--getting to figure out how Loki was behind everything in that episode.

As for slightly more obscure villains, probably the Mad Thinker for similar reasons.



M.O.D.O.C. and the Wasp from The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

Marvel.com: Are there any more plans to explore a villain's origins, such as in the "Everything is Wonderful" episode with Wonder Man?

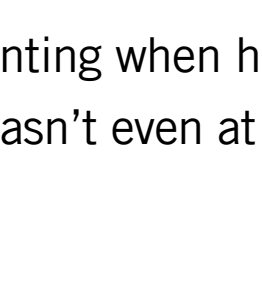
Joshua Fine: We have one huge villain origin-story coming up that we've been building towards since the micro-episodes. I don't want to give away who it is, but I'll give you a hint: he's an artificial intelligence designed by Doctor Henry Pym…called Ultron!

Marvel.com: The Kang storyline was one of the big events of the first season. What were some challenges in getting that story told and condensing it into only a few episodes?

Joshua Fine: From a writing standpoint, the biggest challenge was to figure out what the three parts were. We knew that this story was going to be big enough to be worthy of a three-part event in the middle of the season, but whenever possible we try to design each part to stand on its own as well. Figuring out how to break up the story such that the first and second part had a satisfying ending was a little tricky, but I think it worked out pretty well.

The bigger challenge came in production. The middle part of the Kang saga, with the huge invasion force, is the most complex episode animation-wise in the entire series. The action is so huge and sustained for so long, that it was actually an intensely difficult episode for our animators to tackle. Not to mention that our sound designers then had to match all of that visual action with aural good-ness. One of them told me that he stopped counting when he got to the 150th explosion of the episode, and that wasn't even at the halfway point.

Marvel.com: What are the hardest and easiest parts of balancing so many different villains?

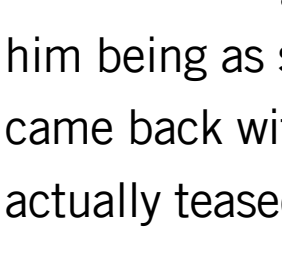


HYDRA from The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

Joshua Fine: Keeping them different from one another is probably the biggest challenge. It sounds silly, but the easiest trap to fall into with villains is, "I'm doing this because I'm bad" or "I'm doing this because I'm crazy." In order to create distinctly different-feeling episodes, with cool, memorable villains, you really have to step back and make sure that your villains all have different goals and different motivations for going after those goals. That means that not everyone can be just about conquering the world because they're crazy and power-hungry.

The easiest part of balancing the villains is that the Marvel Universe provides such a rich, varied, source of villainy to pull from. Sure, sometimes villains' motivations need to be updated a bit, or you need to jump around in Avengers history to find the most compelling scheme that a villain ever had--but the cast of characters is there for the adapting.

Marvel.com: Are there any villains whose final appearances onscreen differed drastically from how they were first envisioned for the show?



The villains break out in The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

Joshua Fine: For the most part we aimed to emulate the characters' classic looks from the comics. In a couple places we updated them a bit though. Off the top of my head, Graviton changed some. In the books he was thinner, had a cape and a bit of a Magneto-meets-Mister Sinister look to him. When we were initially working on "Breakout" that's how I was envisioning him.

But when it came time to design him, our designers got rid of the cape, mostly for storytelling reasons. He's been in prison…where would the cape come from? They also turned his costume into more of a practical, S.H.I.E.L.D.-designed restraining suit, and bulked him up a bit to get him away from the Magneto body-type. I liked what they did, so we went with it.

Chemistro was another one. Who? Yeah, Chemistro. He's on screen for about two seconds in "Breakout, Part 1," and wins the award for most not-recognized-by-fans villain in the show. I had envisioned him being as silly-looking as he is in the comics, but then Ciro came back with one of the coolest villain designs I've ever seen. I actually teased him for betraying the character's classic lameness. I liked this version of the character so much that we found a place to bring him back in an equally cool episode later in the season.

Marvel.com: M.O.D.O.C., Grim Reaper, and Enchantress. Who'd win a no-holds fight?

Baron Zemo and Arnim Zola from The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!

Joshua Fine: Grim Reaper goes down first in this battle--I love him, but he's not even close to the other two. Between M.O.D.O.C. and Enchantress… that's an interesting dilemma. Magic vs. technology. That might make a good theme for an episode, don't you think?

We saw that M.O.D.O.C.'s mental blast was capable of hurting even Thor, so we have to assume that Amora would be susceptible to it. But Amora has teleportation, magical shielding, and any number of offensive enchantments on her side. I'd have to give her the edge in this one.

Don't forget you can download all the episodes aired so far right now on iTunes.

Check out the episode guide, tons of videos and more on "The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes!" hub page.

Are you on Twitter? Use hashtag #AvengersEMH to let @Marvel know what you think about the show!

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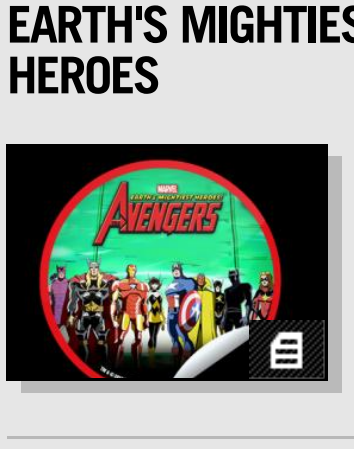

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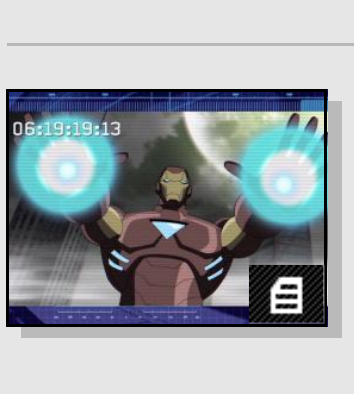

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